

New Mexico Occupational Health Surveillance Program Annual Performance Report

New Mexico Department of Health, Epidemiology and Response Division,

Environmental Health Epidemiology Bureau

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Program type: Fundamental Surveillance

Project overview and major accomplishments: In 2002, the New Mexico Department of Health joined forces with the University of New Mexico to establish an occupational health surveillance system for the state with the initial goals of 1) utilizing existing data from various state and federal agencies, public and private health data sources, and academic institutions and 2) establishing a registry into which these data and individual case reports of occupational illness could be combined in order to produce valid, reliable and useful surveillance information. Since the initial capacity building was undertaken, the NM Occupational Health Surveillance Program (NMOHSP) has expanded goals to promote the use of surveillance data by stakeholders for illness and injury prevention. The NMOHSP is unique in its focus of outreach to underserved tribal communities and settled migrant populations.

The current funding period has been extraordinarily active with several additional activities due to internal and external collaborations, and responses to case reports and public inquiries. Highlights include:

- Inventory of Worker Protection Standard (WPS) trainings of farmworkers in the New Mexico-Mexico border region. This is a collaborative project with the Southwest Center for Agricultural Health, Injury Prevention, and Education.
- Provided occupational surveillance expertise to the development of survey questions and assisted in data collection for two Environmental Health Epidemiology Bureau (EHEB) biomonitoring projects. The first project assessed uranium in the urine and drinking water of residents in the Grants and Laguna Pueblo uranium belt regions. The second project took place in agricultural communities in the border region and measured heavy metals in drinking water along with metals and organophosphates in the urine of community members.
- Coordinated the investigation of a worksite after reports of two spa maintenance workers with hypersensitivity pneumonitis symptoms tested positive for Mycobacterium Avium Complex (MAC). Collaborated with New Mexico OSHA and the Department of Health's Infectious Disease Bureau. Specimens and water samples were submitted to the CDC Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion Outbreak Laboratory in Atlanta and results have recently been received. A report of the investigation is planned for dissemination this fall.

Data systems enhancements/explorations:

- Facilitated the provision of New Mexico death certificate data to NIOSH for the coding of occupation and industry. Data will be incorporated into the National Occupational Mortality Surveillance System (NOMS II).
- Developed reporting criteria for electronic laboratory reporting of notifiable occupational exposures through the NMDOH Electronic Laboratory Reporting System.

Outreach to healthcare:

- Periodic calls are being made to occupational physicians throughout the state to remind them to report occupational illnesses to the New Mexico Occupational Health Registry (NMOHR). This has increased reporting several-fold over the previous year.
- Presented on occupational health surveillance in New Mexico to the New Mexico Case Management Society, then the New Mexico Osteopathic Medical Association annual conferences October, 2009.
- Project ECHO Telemedicine presentation to physicians on occupational pesticide poisonings in New Mexico, December, 2009.

External outreach/partnership activities:

- Participated in an expert panel discussion of environmental and occupational issues at the EPA Beyond Translation Hispanic Community Forum and Eco Café, November, 2009, Las Cruces, NM.
- Assembled and analyzed agricultural injury data and presented at a panel discussion of agricultural injury at the New Mexico Injury Prevention Coalition Spring Meeting, May, 2010.
- Attended the Colorado Occupational Health Surveillance strategic planning meeting and presented on New Mexico's experiences with developing a state-based occupational health surveillance program, Denver, CO May 2010.
- UNM and NMDOH have participated in the newly formed New Mexico at Work Partnership. The partnership brings together concerned physicians, employers and others to advocate for modifications to allow injured workers to return to work as quickly as possible.

Data analyses and investigations

- Responded to a group of concerned workers regarding several cases of cancer in workers at a state school. Reviewed data regarding the cases, and the investigation by the school's environmental health and safety office. Results of the analysis and health communication on cancer were presented by the NMOHSP and NM Environmental Public Health Tracking epidemiologists to school staff June, 2010. Received written feedback that the presentation was very helpful in addressing the workers' concerns.
- In collaboration with the NM Asthma Epidemiology program, analyzed BRFSS data for the prevalence of self-reported occupational asthma in New Mexico. Data were presented at the National Environmental Health Conference, June, 2010 Albuquerque, NM.

Publications/presentations/materials: "Could You Have Work-Related Asthma?" fact sheet developed and posted in English and Spanish on the NMOHSP website <http://nmhealth.org/eheb/occhealth.shtml>.

Lessons learned: Through conducting the MAC and cancer investigations we found that it is essential to establish interagency and external partnerships in order to launch coordinated, successful responses to incidences of occupational illness and injury.

Plans for upcoming year: The NMOHSP plans to revitalize its advisory by holding strategic planning meetings in order to develop workgroups to address specific occupational health priorities as agreed on by participants. The program will suggest that the group conduct an assessment of current conditions on the Occupational Notifiable Conditions list. The NMOHSP also plans to develop a listserve for the distribution of occupational illness and injury data and information partners within healthcare, regulatory agencies, industry and worker groups throughout the state. Finally, the program will resubmit an application to implement capacity around tribal occupational health surveillance.